Group Identity, Ideology, and Mass Media: Content Analysis of the 2018 Media

Spectacles Family Separation and Migrant Caravan

by

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ABSTRACT

Media content analysis prompts an examination of the process through which meaning making and identity is reflected in and simultaneously shaped by a commercialized mass media industry. Immigration coverage in mass media especially drives ideological identity work as national identity ideology becomes a debate between two politically distinct sides. This content analysis examines print and cable news coverage of two media spectacles involving immigration in 2018: family separation at the border and migrant caravans. This thesis examines the themes that emerge across politically diverse news outlets and categorizes them in terms of how the phenomena is represented among distinct group identities utilizing Ethnographic Content Analysis methodology (Altheide 1987). Findings show that as media outlets are both bound by and champions for their political ideologies, convincing the audience to feel one way in contrast to another way becomes a battle between the political left and right. During the 2018 border media spectacles, evidence employed by the media in this battle consistently included these themes: 1) lamenting childhood trauma and condemning those who caused it, 2) fact checking the enemy and delivering reality to the audience, 3) framing in political terms, 4) assigning a guilty party for the Latino Immigrant Issue at hand, and 5) asking who is responsible to then step up and address the Latino Immigrant Issue and at what cost to *Americans?*

I. INTRODUCTION

Consuming political media coverage is virtually inescapable today as social media spaces like Facebook and Twitter serve as platforms where media consumers share journal articles and TV news coverage clips to an audience who might have otherwise abstained. Particularly, as the 2020 presidential election is underway, individual media consumers are pressured to categorize themselves into larger group identities, whether this process is intentional or subconscious. In this way, understanding the role of the media in identity, and more specifically group identity work, through Habermas' theoretical lens of the media as a commercialized product for consumption and powerful influencer of public thought, and through Mead's concept of the self as practiced and processed through social interaction, the analysis of American media coverage is inherently an analysis of social political group identity and group meaning making. Media content analysis prompts an examination into the process through which meaning making is reflected in and simultaneously shaped by a commercialized mass media industry.

To narrow the focus of this study to media coverage of immigration at the U.S. southern border, we see the political identity work to also encompass national identity work through debating and negotiating who is "us" and thus who is not, as well as who is allowed in "our" space and under what terms. Key narratives within the media coverage center around negotiating an identity of "them". Who "they" are is negotiated by telling stories about migrants coming to the U.S. and immigrants already in the U.S. These stories develop common patterns, themes, and eventually, common-sense truths. Such narratives prompt consumers to align themselves within their political group identities as

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these political groups make meaning about their respective identities and debate, decide, and declare who belongs to the larger, more ultimate "us": Americans.

Extant research involving media analysis on immigration coverage largely focuses on the formation of meta narratives, racialization of immigrants, and influence of type of coverage on political opinion formation. Examining the relationship between media consumption and distinct group identity formation in the context of immigration news coverage is largely lacking and is particularly absent in the analysis of contemporary coverage.

The content analysis presented in this thesis examines print and cable news coverage of two media spectacles involving immigration: family separation at the border and migrant caravans. I do not have to define these terms or provide contextual background to elicit images and most likely emotions from the reader. This is the power of today's mass media news coverage and the 24/7 coverage of media spectacles. However, which images and which sort of emotions were conjured likely depends on the group identity to which the reader belongs. While selves are certainly complicated and overlapping, American political identity is primarily ordered around two opposing groups. American institutions largely socialize individuals into these opposing groups through proliferation of narratives that propel individuals to align with a liberal or conservative ideological identity.

Thus, an analysis of recent media spectacle coverage among print and television media outlets that are widely accepted to be conservative or liberal allows us to take the temperature of conservative and liberal ideological or political identity, which in turn reveals predictable voting and mobilization patterns among these two group identities in

contemporary American society. Specifically, these two sample media spectacles thus

serve as litmus tests for distinct group identity and common-sense stance on immigration,

and more specifically, Latinx immigration.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The 2010 General Social Survey shows that about 73 percent of Americans link increases in immigration with increases in criminality (Kaushal 2019). Data do not support this link however (Butcher & Piehl 1998; Kaushal 2019; Ousey & Kubrin 2009), which suggests Americans are not basing immigration related political opinion on researched fact or lived experience. How then are Americans forming real feelings and opinions about immigrants and immigration policy?

Analyzing the national conversation on immigration reveals the multifaceted internal debate about who "we" are as Americans, who is designated a worthy immigrant deserving a legal pathway to integration, and who is designated an unworthy immigrant deserving detention and deportation. Additionally, such an analysis reveals the consequences of the conversation as narratives move from the screen and page into the pounding fist of the politician and the crowd's chants to police bodies not included in our narrative of us as Americans, or in the least those others who are "good", "deserving" immigrants. As a product for consumption the media as both institution of information and corporation has a unique position of power to construct the public's understanding of and feelings towards current events and political issues; and further, to inform national identity (Benson 2009; Brader & Valentino 2008; Chavez 2008; Habermas 1989; Hassel 2015; Muscat 2019; Tingly 2013).

Habermas theorizes that the mass media significantly influences the public by acting as the main or often sole source of information (Habermas 1989). In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* Habermas (1989) details the stretch of influence the media exercises in the public's life and describes the current public sphere

as primarily steered by the mass media. Habermas argues that the mass media has had a negative effect on the public sphere by diminishing the public sphere as a rational-critical political debate platform. In essence this means that group identity is formed in large part by mass media, rendering individuals powerless or at least deferential to the opinions and information presented by mass media. This works insofar as "the sender of the message hides his business intentions in the role of someone interested in the public welfare" (193) and counting on a stubborn group identity which forgoes "intelligent criticism of publicly discussed affairs" and is instead characterized by bowing to "a mood of conformity with publicly presented persons or personifications" (195).

This process of growing into and strengthening group identity in place of a strictly independent individual identity through consuming narratives on group identities can be understood through Mead's concept of self and the role of interaction with narratives. Mead (1934) theorized that society is the creator of the self through symbols, language, relationships, and institutions. One reviewer summarized that in *Mind, Self, and Society*, Mead establishes that "Man… is not born human; the biological accident becomes a personality through social experience" (Ellsworth 1936: 810). In this same way, group identity becomes through social interaction and is thus continuously becoming through relationships, language, symbols, and consuming and negotiating narratives. Therefore, as mass media exercises dominance over the public sphere, politically fueled narratives consequently construct group identity through reflection, construction, and proliferation of identity narratives based on an "us" versus "them" mentality; which is to build group identity based on what you perceive to have in common with the others belonging to "us" at such a close and intense level that "us" must exclude all of "them". As identity then is

something informed and practiced through consumption of distinct political ideological narratives in the media, the individual is conceptualizing herself as part of something beyond her individual experience, thoughts, and personality. As Durkheim (1984) and Anderson (1983) might say, her individual consciousness is overshadowed by the National or state consciousness as represented in institutions like the media, as such institutions create a space through which the individual is prompted to feel a powerful sense of belonging with individuals never met and maybe never seen. Importantly, her individual consciousness is also eclipsed by the distinct political expression of the national or state consciousness represented by her media of choice. I argue that these competing narratives are born from the impulse to maintain power and status quo in an evolving society. As subordinate groups gain power and access to rights, the dominant group is then pushed to re-negotiate group identity and draw new lines around who they are as dominant and who the others are as subordinate. Thus, extending Mead's theory of individual identity formation, we see Americans engage in group identity formation through social interaction by means of media narratives, and create, repeat, and negotiate these narratives about themselves and the "other" groups in order to strengthen a sense of power through identity. This process is especially explicit in mass media narratives on Latinx immigration.

Anthropologist Leo Chavez, known for his work on immigration and media representation of immigrants, demonstrates in his books *The Latino Threat Narrative* (2008) and *Covering Immigration* (2001) how the media's portrayal of immigration and immigrants themselves can be categorized into a handful of themes; all with the effect of drawing lines between us and them- us being Americans and them being outsiders,

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foreigners, and aliens. Chavez specifically argues that "how we, as a nation of diverse people, derive our understanding of who to include in our imagined community of fellow citizens is a product of…what we glean from the media" (Chavez 2008; 5). Chavez boils the U.S. immigration debate down to a citizenship debate and who we imagine ourselves to be as Americans, specifically asserting that regarding detention, wall building, or any other measure to secure borders and the nation from "illegal" immigrants "reveals how we imagine ourselves as a nation" (Chavez 2008: 9). Chavez argues that the media's narrative (namely the "Latino Threat Narrative") on immigration successfully shapes public discourse on immigration and feelings towards immigrants due to the fact that "its basic premises are taken for granted as true" (Chavez 2008: 41). Chavez identifies, analyzes, and dismantles through original research these prominent "taken for granted truths" present in the Latino Threat Narrative. While he focuses on the role of the media spectacle (in this context 9/11 and subsequent ratcheting up of national security as well as the 2005 Minutemen illegal alien hunt at the border) in the process of disseminating ideas, fears, and policy agendas, Chavez states "the themes in this discourse have been so consistent over the last 40 years they could be said to be independent of the current fear of international terrorism" (Chavez 2008: 41).

Recently we see the raising of the stakes once again in 2016 after a series of highly publicized terrorist attacks in Europe and the U.S. marginalization of Muslim immigrants including asylum seekers, as the 2016 election narrowed in on border security. The rhetoric espoused today is consistent with Chavez' analysis of decades of immigration related news coverage. Thus, the ultimate and seemingly unchanging Latino Threat Narrative posits Latino immigrants or citizens as unwilling or unable to assimilate,

which amounts to a perceived "re-conquest" of the Southwest United States. Chavez examines varying themes of the Latino re-conquest represented in media including presentation of Latinas as both hypersexual and highly fertile, and prevalence of the Spanish language as evidence of a Latino take over.

Media spectacles shape a group identity's thoughts and opinions by appealing to collective common sense in the way it frames the current issue, and thus out of its far-reaching accessibility and status as an information institution, coverage during media spectacles affirm, reinforce, and actively construct group identity. Through this process therefore, I argue that the media consumer's attitudinal changes are not the result of weighing the evidence presented or of an internal debate on the issue, but rather that these changes in the individual media consumer are the result of this individual being informed of his groups' position on an issue and adopting said position as his own.

It is important to make clear that identity work in terms of political identity can largely be an involuntary process drawing in those who might claim they are not political. This can function as "one body of literature claims that a highly dramatic, intense, and sensational coverage is what is needed to get people interested in political matters and that the human-interest frame may contribute to increased political knowledge among disinterested members of the public" (Beyer and Figenschou 2015:257). As viewers are consumers rather than participants, and consumers of biased, "sensational" news coverage, an individual's political opinion could be formed solely around the news coverage point of view, and the consumer selects her news coverage to be in congruence with her political identity, even if such an identity is passive. In this way, carefully crafted coverage not representative of the facts or a true picture of immigration but one

that "because the news media outlets are primarily driven by profit, they are apt to favor stories that feature border violence and clandestine border crossings, because they are attention getting and emotionally riveting; such stories drive up readership and in turn increase profit" (Hassel 2015: 178), becomes the norm regardless of political ideology so long as the media outlet operates from the bottom line.

Cultural, political, and organizational narratives significantly and continuously imprint upon the individual to form and reform sense of self and one's personal narrative (Loseke 2007) and group identity formation (Anderson 2016, Chavez 2008, Loseke 2007, Maines 2000). When considering the immigration narrative, this point serves crucial to understanding a foundational tenant for the irrelevance of obtaining objective facts on an event or issue in place of passively consuming common-sense truths given by political experts and information experts within a political ideological identity group. Thus, if the narrative espoused by one's identity group is that we are under attack, that we are deprived of resources, that certain politicians do not care about "us" or "our" jobs, "we" can adopt the identity of victim and internalize feelings of fear and anger toward "them" (Berbriar 2000; Brader, Valentino, Suhay 2008; DiAngelo 2011; Hjerm 2007; Hughey 2014; King and Wheelock 2007; Jayakumar and Adamian 2017; Markert 2010; Miller 2016). Similarly, media proclaiming we are allies and "they" on the opposite side of the political scale are bad Americans who are racist and set out to do harm, "we" then are free from guilt within the "crisis" currently at hand. "They" are the ones to blame for the phenomena and "our" narrative allows us to go on guilt free as an ally, activist, or sympathizer. In this way, identity narratives formed and bestowed upon individuals by mass media serve to foster political identity, and importantly, political action in the form

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of voting behavior or calls and petitions to congress.

In this way group identity is constructed largely within political groups as these groups are simultaneously reflected in and constructed by the media in all forms characterized and subsequently owned by either a conservative or liberal identity. While this applies to most all media, the most obvious examples are MSNBC and FOX News as this Pew Research article asserts:

"During the late stages of the 2012 presidential campaign, a Pew Research analysis found that Barack Obama received far more negative coverage than positive on the Fox News Channel. Yet Fox found its ideological mirror image in MSNBC. In the final stretch of the campaign, nearly half (46%) of Obama's coverage on Fox was negative, while just 6% was positive in tone. But MSNBC produced an even harsher narrative about the Republican in the race: 71% of Romney's coverage was negative, versus 3% positive" (Holcomb 2014).

An alternative yet compatible explanation for Americans reporting strong opinions on immigration related issues despite neither having extensive personal experience with immigrant communities nor having knowledge of the facts surrounding immigration issues is ethnocentrism or group cues communicated in the news media that elevate levels of anxiety within the in group against the out group (Brader & Valentino 2008; Hassel 2015; Tingly 2013). Studies show that "anxiety-eliciting news" regarding an issue informed by and shaping group cues influences public political opinion and action (Brader and Valentino 2008). To exemplify this claim specifically referring to immigration news coverage, Brader and Valentino's (2008) study shows that "citizens felt more threatened by Latino immigration, not European immigration, and this feeling triggered opposition to immigration and multilingual laws, prompted requests for information, and led people to send anti-immigration messages to Congress" (975). This study claims to demonstrate that "group cues in immigration discourse can elicit anxiety

and changes in anxiety, not perceived threat, mediate the impact of these cues on opinion and political behavior" (Brader and Valentino 2008:975). This group cue elicited anxiety fits within the framework of narratives, and particularly narratives consumed in mass media, as a strong incubator for group identity work. Narratives proliferated in mass media of immigrants as criminals, invaders, and costly have partisan effects, with white consumers of negative, fearful narratives of immigration in particular leaving the Democratic party and favoring alignment with the Republican party (Hassel 2015).

The mass migration from Cuba to the United States in 1980 is an example in our recent history of the mass media shaping the national discussion, and consequentially the national opinion and political action towards a group of immigrants. In 1980 the United States received 124, 779 Cuban immigrants, compared to similar mass migration rates of 5,000 in 1965 and 20,000 between 1974 and 1978 (Aguirre 1994). The 1980 surge was considerably larger than migration groups in the past and resettlement agency bureaucrats felt it (Aguirre 1994). Aguirre argues that the immigrants' political and bureaucratic fate were ultimately decided by the media, emphasizing that a sociological perspective of this phenomena "must take into account the degree to which the official acts were legitimized by actions taken by the mass media in mobilizing public opinion against the deviants through a propaganda campaign" (Aguirre 1994: 157). The "deviants" being the Cuban immigrants who were coming to the United States undocumented, which was previously an acceptable method of immigrating from Cuba, and therefore only became "deviant" when the U.S. changed the rules once the immigrants had already arrived. Aguirre's analysis of the media coverage during this specific time frame is an example of analyzing a media spectacle.

So, what is a "media spectacle"? A media spectacle refers to the sudden and far reaching news coverage of an event (Beyer and Fegenschou 2018; Chavez 2008). Thus, as the time and space media occupies increases in the public's daily life, the subject matter is simplified and objectified for palatability, making it possible to then analyze the issue at hand and propose solutions all while taking the humanity completely out (Chavez 2008, Hassel 2015). Further, perhaps due to their sudden and sensational nature, media spectacles tend to reflect public "common sense" on an issue as already established by the cycle of news media consumption and regurgitation, and thus serves almost as a litmus test for where the public "common sense" stands at a given point in time on the particular issue. Therefore, as the public common sense is called upon and tested during media spectacles, they are not just mirrors, but "productive acts that construct knowledge about subjects in our world" and "how we internalize who we are as a people" (Chavez 2008: 5). Essentially, media spectacles play a large role in informing the nation's identity and subsequently one's political identity within one of two opposing forces aiming to steer the national identity.

III. METHODOLOGY

If media spectacles ultimately reveal and construct national identity, what did the media spectacle of child separation and the migrant caravan specifically reveal about how we view ourselves as Americans? News coverage of the media spectacle of immigrant child separation conjured images (rhetorical and literal) of cages, child abuse, traumatized toddlers, teenagers playing video games, and all in the debate about what the nation should do about families being separated. It is a confusing swirl of politics, law, and bureaucracy, all amid a developing stance on the political left to abolish ICE. Similarly, the media spectacle on the migrant caravan centered on what type of immigrant was coming and for what reason, whether that type of immigrant should be permitted to enter the United States, and which U.S. actors and agencies should respond to the incoming group of Latin American migrants and how.

This media content analysis examines Latino Immigrant coverage in both print and cable news network form from collectively accepted liberal and conservative news sources. The two specific media spectacles examined in this analysis are the child separation coverage between May and July 2018 and the migrant caravan coverage between October and November 2018. Articles and news segments covering each spectacle are analyzed for common themes in order to demonstrate the ways in which society engaged in distinguishing between us and them, and therefore what sympathy, rights, outrage, advocacy, or policy should be extended to those who might not be a part of us in the context of wrestling with detention and family separation, and the potential increase of Latin American immigrants.

Print and visual media news coverage of these two media spectacles are analyzed for themes utilizing ethnographic content analysis methodologies. Ethnographic Content Analysis (ECA) works well for this study as ECA "utilizes tools of ethnographers to analyze text" and in this instance also visual representation in the news, to understand themes through constant comparison allowing commonalities to emerge naturally (Altheide 1996: 17). More specifically, as this study aims to decipher distinct messaging among distinct political group identities, ECA is best utilized as methodology in that in the lens of ECA "like all ethnographic research, the meaning of a message is assumed to be reflected in various modes of information exchange, format, rhythm and style, e.g., aural and visual style, as well as in the context of the report itself, and other nuances" (Altheide 1987: 68). For this reason, this analysis examines the message itself, its presentation, visuals utilized to represent the phenomena, "experts" interviewed or selected to provide insight into the phenomena, and headlines themselves to demonstrate the way the media spectacle shaped the debate, the facts, the emotions, and call to action across diverse platforms within respective group identities. To execute the analysis the researcher viewed and transcribed the cable news segments. The researcher then read the print articles and cable news segment transcriptions several times and documented emergent themes. The researcher cross compared the news content as well as the observed themes numerous times and codified the consolidated and consistent emergent themes. The researcher then examined the themes that emerged across politically diverse news outlets and categorized them in terms of how the phenomena is represented among distinct group identities.

News sources were chosen by political variety, accessibility, and popularity. Segments from Fox News and MSNBC were analyzed and not CNN or any other TV news network because of the stark political ideologies they represent, the large number of segments published by their respective networks to YouTube making the videos accessible for anytime viewing and sharing on social media, and because "the latest survey from Nielsen shows CNN is losing the primetime cable news race. It has 944,000 viewers from 8 to 11 p.m. EST. Compare that to 2.3 million for Fox News and 1.7 million for MSNBC" (Sago 2018). While some sources cite a decline in cable news network viewership, these studies do not account for cable news segments shared on social media and contradict a finding by the Pew Research Center "that cable networks were the main source of political news for Americans during the 2016 election season" and that "the number of people watching the channels has gone up from 2.7 and 4.7 million since 2017" (Sago 2018). Similarly, The Intercept, Washington Post, TIME, The Economist, The National Review, and Breitbart were chosen to represent a political spectrum from far-left, left, centrist, right, and far right, respectively.

Further, this content analysis narrows its focus to specific dates within each media spectacle. The analysis of Family Separation mostly focuses on news coverage within and around June 16th thru June 23rd as this time frame is roughly in the middle of the media spectacle that began after Jeff Sessions' announcement May 2018 and trickled out by the end of July 2018 and is also importantly the time frame with the greatest spike in interest of media coverage on child and family separation (see figure 1). For these reasons the six cable news segments and 12 news articles analyzed for this spectacle were published within or around this time frame. This content analysis therefore provides a

snap shot comparison of news coverage during the mid-point and interest peak of family separation.

Similarly, while there have been multiple media spectacles concerning alleged migrant caravans, the most significant in 2018 is the spectacle between October and November of 2018, with peak prevalence in the public sphere being between October 21 and October 27 (see figure 2). An additional six cable news segments and 12 news articles published during this week will be analyzed for common themes and compared with the family separation themes in order to generalize about media spectacle coverage of immigration issues along distinct political identities.

IV. FINDINGS

Recalling Leo Chavez's words that "media spectacles objectify Latinos" (Chavez 2008: 6) and thus make it possible for journalists, commentators, and audiences to probe the *issue* of Latino immigration, the following discussion frames emergent themes across the political spectrum with the understanding that the humanity of the daughters, brothers, and friends involved is virtually absent in typical coverage. It is not the human which is considered but the social and political problem of the Immigrant. For this reason, I employ the term "Latino Immigrant Issue".

As a socio-political problem, the issue of immigration is not one that is reflected on, but rather about which is debated on either side of a political line. As such, two tactics were most commonly employed to convince American viewers and readers that their respective argument stood on the only legitimate foundation: consulting an expert, and false dichotomy frames. These tactics are evident within both border spectacles analyzed and are employed by both print and cable news media across the political spectrum.

Emergent themes in both the child separation and migrant caravan media spectacles involve determining how Americans should *feel* about the Latino Immigrant. The product to be consumed by viewers and readers then is wrapped up in emotional language espoused by the consumer's ideological group and does not intentionally challenge the consumer to ponder real immigrants' stories and the context of their circumstances. Thus, as media is actively telling and showing the audience how to feel about the Latino Immigrant Issue (Chavez 2008; Chavez 2001), and considering that media outlets are both bound by and champions for their political ideologies, as the combined theoretical approach of Habermas and Mead informs us, convincing the

audience to feel one way in contrast to another way becomes a battle between the political left and right. Evidence employed by the media in this battle consistently included these themes: 1) lamenting childhood trauma and condemning those who caused it, 2) fact checking the enemy and delivering reality to the audience, 3) framing in political terms, 4) assigning a guilty party for the Latino Immigrant Issue at hand, and 5) asking who is responsible to then step up and address the Latino Immigrant Issue and at what cost to *Americans*?

Trauma and Who's Fault is it?

Within this theme, the media spectacle of child separation at the border specifically centered on the adverse effects children experience who are separated from parents or who experience trauma in general. Coverage generally aligned in categorizing separation from parents as a negative phenomenon, whether described as a humanitarian crisis, un-American, or simply unfortunate. However, along the political spectrum the media coverage gradually varied in discussion of who or what is to blame for the children's trauma and consequently what the nation's response should be to alleviate the trauma.

Right, centrist, and left leaning media described the distress and psychological damage in children as being caused by separation itself, and most blame the Trump administration for this separation and resulting child trauma.

From the National Review:

"America can secure its border without taking a child from his mother's arms to prosecute a misdemeanor".

From The Economist:

"Young children in cages, sleeping on thin mattresses and covered in foil blankets.

Children crying for their mothers and fathers. A sobbing mother recounting how the daughter she was breastfeeding was taken away. These are glimpses of the ongoing family separations at America's southern border".

From TIME:

"Earlier this year, a young Honduran woman named Mirian gathered her 18-month-old son into her arms and walked across the bridge between Matamoros, Mexico, and Brownsville, Texas, where she presented herself to U.S. border agents to ask for asylum. Mirian and her son spent the night in a detention facility. The next day, officials told her to put her son into a car seat in the back of a government vehicle. Her hands shook as she buckled him in. The officials wouldn't tell her where they were taking him, she wrote in a personal statement later published by CNN.com–only that she would not be allowed to go with him. As the car pulled away, she could see her baby looking back at her through the window, screaming".

This particular TIME article continues, citing instances of children sobbing, border patrol agents lying to parents, and the brain damage caused by trauma and by not having parents at an early age generally. This article goes further to pose the question of whether the Zero-Tolerance policy is legal and cites lawsuits that have already been filed against the policy, ultimately suggesting to readers that a more important question Americans and political leaders should ask is whether the policy is *humane*. The Washington Post also discusses trauma and blames the trauma on the Trump administration's policy and cites experts on childhood trauma. One article published June 18, 2018 titled, "What Separation from Parents does to Children: "The effect is Catastrophic" includes a statement from Charles Nelson, a pediatrics professor at Harvard Medical School:

"In time, the stress can start killing off neurons and — especially in young children — wreaking dramatic and long-term damage, both psychologically and to the physical structure of the brain."

This particular article cites other medical institutions and psychologists who have organized a petition which includes the statement:

"To pretend that separated children do not grow up with the shrapnel of this traumatic experience embedded in their minds is to disregard everything we know about child

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development, the brain, and trauma…".

The article goes on to discuss similar research in Romanian orphanages, thus equating the

two phenomena and resulting psychological damage including lower IQs and cognitive

delays. The article concludes with a key statement on the significance of trauma in this

debate and its assumed responsible party:

"If you take the moral, spiritual, even political aspect out of it, from a strictly medical and
scientific point of view, what we as a country are doing to these children at the border is
unconscionable," said Luis H. Zayas, a psychiatry professor at the University of Texas at
Austin. "The harm our government is now causing will take a lifetime to undo".

Media that trends left of center more often employed emotional language and also

blamed the trauma caused by this separation on the Trump administration.

From MSNBC's segment *The Rachel Maddow Show*:

"On orders from the president it's now the job of some federal employees to forcibly take
babies away from their mothers, where they are first locked up in cages at the border with
space blankets for comfort. If they're lucky they might eventually get moved to a giant
disused Walmart with a thousand other kids, and since that system's breaking down,
maybe military bases next"?

MSNBC coverage also stated that the Trump administration is "using child abuse as a

tool for government policy" and that the Zero Tolerance policy is the "policy of

orphaning children" while showing the widely used image of the little girl in the red shirt

crying while standing next to two adults who are presumably her mother and a border

patrol officer. MSNBC coverage also employs use of term "government inflicted

trauma".

Similar to left leaning media, far-left media describes child separation terms of

"babies and children" being taken from their parents and blames the Trump

administration and the Zero Tolerance policy for inflicting childhood trauma. Far-left

coverage also included photos interspersed within articles of women and young children behind chain link enclosures.

From the Intercept:

"The Trump administration's program of systematically separating migrant children from their parents is steadily expanding, government officials confirmed Tuesday".

"Part of what's making the impact of "zero tolerance" and family separation so profoundly difficult to respond to, especially in terms of reunification, attorneys say, is that huge numbers of the people involved are little kids, toddlers, and babies — all of whom now have their own immigration cases, and no parents around to help".

Also from The Intercept, referring to a statement by field expert Dona Abbott, branch director of refugee services for Bethany Christian Services:

"The issue of state-enforced separations, involving armed men in uniforms with guns, she added, can be particularly jarring for children from areas in Central America and Mexico where the line between organized crime and government security forces is nonexistent, and the entire purpose of the journey north was to escape precisely those kinds of scenarios".

Again employing the expert strategy, The Intercept quotes executive director Lauren Dasse of the Florence Project, an organization that provides free legal services in detention centers:

"We are creating immeasurable trauma — immeasurable trauma, that will have lifelong effects on people," Dasse said. "I've never seen anything like this."

Far-right media discussed the potential child trauma caused by exploitation like human trafficking, the difficult journey north, and the "abuse" parents put them through; citing things like harsh desert conditions, limited or at times no food, walking thousands of miles, traveling with a coyote, risk of rape, etc. Thus, far-right media blamed trauma on the families themselves or blamed uncontrollable conditions that the families chose willingly to subject themselves to, in contrast to far left, left, center and right leaning media, which all blame the Zero Tolerance policy and the Trump administration.

As far-right coverage frames the children's trauma as resulting from irresponsible parents taking advantage of U.S. immigration law and human traffickers taking advantage of U.S. immigration law who are posing as parents or "fake families", this framework feeds the false dichotomy between protecting vulnerable children and putting them in danger as directly linked to politicians' support for Zero-Tolerance policy which de-incentivizes potential for child trauma and child abuse, or support for Catch and Release policy which incentivizes human traffickers and irresponsible, or even some say abusive, parents to take advantage of U.S. immigration law.

From Fox News segment, *The Story with Martha MacCallum*:

"It was sort of understood by some people who wanted to get into the country that if you come as a family they will let you through so this is a better way to come, bring your kids, and now obviously that's changed".

"We effectively subsidized this kind of an approach, that people found out that if you have a child you're gonna be caught and released versus not having a child. The New York Times reported in April that in fact people are admitting this. Families brought children knowing there's a better chance people would get through and be released and that others, and this is the serious dynamic with unaccompanied minors and minors in general, are people posing as parents".

From Fox News Segment

"The illegals know this so they abuse the system, and I would argue endanger their children in the process".

From Breitbart:

"These migrants are guilty of walking minor children through miles and miles of desert with the intent of committing a crime (crossing a border illegally). If you or I walked a child through miles and miles of desert with the intent of committing a crime, child protective services would take our children away (and should)".

Further, in describing the trauma inflicted on children by the journey north to the United Sates, some far-right coverage uses the term "evil" to describe the politicians, media persona, and activists who are calling for an end to child separation.

From Brietbart:

"Evil people want these children dragged across the border, want this abuse incentivized by "keeping the family unit together," because flooding the country with future indebted voters is more important to them than the safety and well-being of small children."

"…letting illegal aliens loose into America, is a virtue as opposed to what it really is: an act of naked evil that encourages child abuse, sexual abuse, sex trafficking, and punishes the already-struggling working class".

"What kind of monster creates a policy that tells sex traffickers that your golden ticket into America is trafficking in young children; a policy that tells these sex abusers that America will not only grant you entry into America if you kidnap or exploit a child, but will allow you to keep your underage sex slave. Of course we want to create a *deterrence* for this horrific behavior, what decent human being would not want to deter this evil?"

Coverage of the migrant caravan specifically centered on debating whether the members of the caravan were legitimate asylum seekers, or as some called them refugees, fleeing legitimate sources of persecution and violence, or whether these were economic migrants, or even dangerous gang members or otherwise violent immigrants. The conclusion assumed by media across the political spectrum (with the exception of far-right media) is that if the group is fleeing legitimate forms of violence, then they deserve entry to claim asylum. If, however the group is not seeking asylum and is instead coming to the United States for work (as most often pointed out by right leaning and far-right media) they are not deserving of sympathy and should be barred from entry without access to certain rights. Depiction of the caravan under this assumption included discussion of its composition being made of gang members and more generally unknowable others with unknowable intentions, or of swindlers manipulating the U.S. and taking advantage of the right to claim asylum. Essentially, within this theme the debate became, who are they? How do we label them?

In defining the migrant caravan, and in doing so telling American how to *feel* about the caravan, one stark difference emerged between right, moderate, and left leaning coverage on the one hand and far-right coverage on the other: fear versus sympathy. Far-right media sources focused on the U.S. border and inside the U.S., the threat the caravan poses to the border, and to local communities once inside the country. Right, center, and left leaning coverage focused on the journey and the conditions of the sending countries, often describing the caravan as composed of "regular people" "small children" "families" "weary" and thus effectively eliciting a sense of vulnerability.

In efforts to inform readers or viewers who comprises the caravan- whether they are asylum seekers or job seekers or unknowable dangerous immigrants- coverage sought to establish the reasons why the caravan left Honduras and was heading for the United States. Far-right, right, center, left, and far-left leaning media focused on establishing the caravan's context and its legal legitimacy to asylum (or not), while left leaning media coverage instead used language to convince the audience that the caravan deserved sympathy and entry, and emphasized any immigrant's right to claim asylum. Thus, left media coverage seemed to operate under the assumption that the group was eligible to claim asylum and deserved sympathy and access to certain rights. Typical depiction of the caravan included focus on mothers and young children- both in content, discussion in the case of cable new segments, and images.

From MSNBC segment *Deadline*:

"…these are desperate people much like my ancestors, almost anyone, any American has someone like that in their background. Whether they're walking over a border or coming on a ship doesn't make much difference".

"Roughly 7,000 migrants fleeing violence and poverty are defying trumps threats to send in the military if they don't turn back".

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"We provide a pathway to safety. We are here to help people like that. These people are escaping rapes and murders and gang violence. Trump continues with mistruths that these people are the gangs themselves and there's so called middle easterners, all that's been refuted. We are a country that when people show up here escaping murder and rape we provide help. We are here to help".

In describing conditions in Central America and the typical reasons a person is involved

in the Caravan, centrist and left leaning media mention gang extortion, death threats,

fleeing violence, "exhausted", and fleeing in desperation (just "wearing flip flops"),

seemingly attempting to validate the caravan's sense of urgency.

From the Washington Post:
"…the ill-nourished pedestrians travel as a pack for protection against gangs; the few who make it to the border, perhaps next month, will likely apply, legally, for asylum".

"It was Oct. 12. She and her cousin had just opened a small business selling tortillas when they were confronted by a gang, threatened with death if they didn't hand over half of their profits. She looked at the Facebook post: "An avalanche of Hondurans is preparing to leave in a caravan to the United States. Share this!" Within three hours, her bags were packed".

From the Economist:

 "As our correspondent in Tapachula reports, the migrants in the caravan are mostly ordinary Hondurans who would rather live somewhere peaceful and rich than poor and violent. There is no evidence of Middle Easterners among them, or an unusual number of criminals".

TIME magazine also employs the expert method to convince readers that they should

sympathize with the migrant caravan. In the October 21, 2018 article titled, "We Won't

Be Broken' Caravan of Migrants Sets Sights on U.S., Defying President Trump's

Threats", TIME quotes a TV reporter from Honduras (an expert through his insider

knowledge as a Honduran himself in an investigative and informative profession) who

says this is the worst moment ever for his country. This reporter stated Hondurans reacted

to the media coverage of the forming caravan by joining themselves because "they are at

breaking point". The quote from this reporter goes on to say that some members are fleeing violence from "street gangs and drug cartels" and others are fleeing poverty. To qualify this last point lest the audience equate this type of migrant with the "economic opportunity migrant" he quoted a member of the caravan who told him that truly their choice was between joining the caravan "or slowly starving to death". Again employing the expert approach, another TIME article published October 22, 2018 quotes a University of Arizona professor: "These migrants are ordinary people from Central America". The use of the term "ordinary" here and in the previous Economist article suggests a deliberate contrast to assertions that they are calculated, manipulators or violent predators. TIME further quotes this professor to say:

"People are doing this openly and visibly, and they plan to show up at the U.S. port of entry and petition for political asylum, and that is exactly how our laws are supposed to function. The crisis comes about when U.S. border officials discourage people from political asylum, leave them on the bridges or threaten them that if they go forward with a political asylum claim, they might lose their children".

Far-left media did not differ greatly from center and left leaning media in its coverage focus narrowing in on establishing the caravan as deserving of sympathy and certain rights.

From The Intercept:

"According to some counts, as many 120,000 Central Americans have disappeared traveling north in recent years — this on top of a drug war that, by conservative estimates, has killed more people than the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan combined. Caravans are meant to provide safety in numbers as migrants navigate this gauntlet".

"As Vox immigration reporter Dara Lind has noted, this dynamic constitutes a "crisis" in the eyes of the administration because asylum-seekers have additional rights — which the administration calls "loopholes" — that prohibit their immediate deportation and their indefinite detention in instances in which children are involved".

"…if those who do make it to the border wish to apply for asylum, it is their right under domestic and international law to do so".

In contrast, right and far-right coverage framed the caravan's reasons for leaving

Honduras and traveling to the United States as primarily owing to weak U.S. immigration

law or politically motivated liberal politicians. Far-right coverage establishes members of

the caravan as untrustworthy. Additionally, far-right media de-legitimizes the basis of the

migrants' claim for asylum and depicts members of the caravan as not asylees or refugees

at all, but immigrants seeking economic opportunity or a "free pass" into the United

States. This argument is further demonstrated by seeking to establish that Honduras is not

currently at war. This idea is argued employing the false dichotomy strategy. Far-right

media's seeming determination to de-legitimize the notion that members of the caravan

are asylum seekers, and as such have grounds for legal entry into the United States to

claim asylum, is accomplished through depicting members of the caravan as dangerous

gang members, migrants seeking better job opportunities, or migrants perhaps fleeing

violence but not fleeing war, meaning they have no legitimate claim for asylum and

therefore no legitimate right to enter the United States. Essentially, the false dichotomy

used here by right and far-right media is: if there is no war, there is no reason to flee and

no reason the U.S should allow them in.

From National Review:

"Our laws and rules have conspired to render the southern border almost null and void for
the category of migration that has been growing at the most rapid clip, families and
minors from Central America".

"What migrants in the caravan understand is that, as members of a family unit from
Central America, if they set foot in the United States, they have a good chance of staying
(hundreds of migrants from a 1,500-strong caravan earlier this year reportedly made it
into the United States). They can surrender to border agents and probably get a bus ticket
to the interior, pending proceedings for which they may never show up".

From Fox:

"Immigrants know what they are doing, and they are trying to exploit U.S. law".

Additionally, Fox News' Tucker Carlson grills a guest on what war these migrants are

fleeing from, "what is the justification" he asks. He insists upon his guest to name the war

and state when it begun, when of course there is no U.S. recognized war in Honduras

with a name and agreed upon start date.

From Breitbart:

"Although often described as asylum-seekers, the migrants admit that they are economic
migrants who are looking for jobs."

Further, far-right leaning media aimed to establish the distinction that not only are the

migrants not legitimate asylum seekers, but neither are they deserving of sympathy at all

because they are criminals. Fox for example hosted a panel including former ICE director

Thomas- employing the consult and expert strategy. He informed viewers that "18-20%"

of those who are arrested at the border and placed into ICE custody "have a criminal

history, they have prior arrests, this isn't the first time they're coming to the country". He

continues, "So they are criminals. We have to protect our border". Thomas adds that he

"Can't blame them for wanting to come because we're the greatest county on earth, but

you can't have it both ways, you have to respect government laws at least under this

president". Interestingly, he mentions this is not the first time they are coming to our

country, which suggests part of the criminal charges included in that statistic would be a

misdemeanor illegal entry or felony re-entry after deportation charge, but nonetheless this

serves to blur the distinction between dangerous crime and petty crime and solidify the

idea that regardless, a criminal is a criminal and deserves punishment and exclusion. Far-

right leaning media also at times established both arguments simultaneously. For example

from Fox:

"What we're learning on the ground is fascinating: 80% are males under the age of 35 not fleeing violence these are economic refugees, they say when they get here and work they are gonna send the money home to El Salvador, a lot of these people are gang affiliated, a lot have been previously deported and that has been confirmed. If they're so upset about the condition in your country, don't march to America, march against your own government. That'll solve a lot of issues in my opinion".

In similar but distinct fashion, the strategy to de-credit or expose an "expert" in the field as ill-informed or unintelligent is also employed to strengthen one side's argument through use of consulting an "expert". Breitbart and Fox segment hosts often quote or interview journalists from popular so-called "liberal" or "fake news" outlets like New York Times, CNN, and Univision, or alleged activists in the field to break down their arguments and purportedly reveal how their stance is false, manipulative, or both. Fox provides a striking example. Tucker Carlson interviews an "immigrant supporter" to comment on the migrant caravan. This individual notably had no official title or introduction beyond "immigrant supporter" and was no match for Carlson's tough interview technique. He allowed himself to be interrupted before making any substantial points, repeated himself, and by the end of the interview seemingly had nothing to say. For example, when asked a few times for the name of the war going on in Honduras, the "immigrant supporter" stated each time "U.S. involvement in Honduras" prompting Carlson to finally say:

"See you don't know what you're talking about you just have a talking point".
"Immigrant Supporter": "Let's look at the U.S. military involvement in Honduras"…
Carlson: "Ok you are totally ignorant of the history of Honduras yet you are lecturing us about how to treat these people because of a war we started, but you can't tell me what war or what year it ended".
"Immigrant Supporter": "Not only that, but U.S. involvement in Latin America".

Carlson cut him off and moved on to discuss voting laws in California that will allow

non-citizens to vote in local school board elections. He was able to change the topic as the victor, having triumphed over "immigrant supporters" who do not really know what is going on and do not know what they are talking about when arguing that the migrants traveling to the U.S. are asylum seekers.

What is Real?

Often specifically utilizing the term "fact check", media outlets distinguish a specific segment or article content from typical coverage in that they are addressing purportedly widely circulated misinformation, addressing a common misunderstanding, or addressing false claims disseminated by a person or institution of power. The media spectacles at the border included this "fact checking" approach and were most often employed by far-left, left, and centrist media against claims made by the president or member of the president's administration, and was most often employed by far-right media against claims made by the so-called liberal media or liberal elites in general. This difference reflects their various intentions for employing the fact checking strategy. Seemingly, the far-right media's intent was to de-legitimize mainstream news media and a liberal political ideology as a whole, in contrast to the left leaning and centrist media's intent to de-legitimize specific claims themselves. In the case of far-left media and some left leaning media, it can be argued the intent of their fact checking was to de-legitimize the president.

During the spectacle of family separation there was a lot of confusion around what exactly was taking place at the border and where children were going. Most notably, the camps or cages debate pitted one set of images and testimony against another, leaving American viewers and readers to consume their tribe's depiction of the detention centers

housing children and to suspect or accuse the other of intentional misinformation. Fact checking family separation at the border thus involved footage and photos of children in detention centers, timelines and discussions of the legal policies determining child and family detention before the Zero-Tolerance policy, and in what way (or not) the Zero-Tolerance policy changed how children and families were detained.

Within right, center, left, and far-left leaning media fact checking most often involved fact checking claims by the Trump administration. For example, The Economist spends time fact checking the "rush of immigrant children" claims by showing a graph demonstrating there is not a current rush or flood that is overwhelming the border.

From TIME regarding Zero-Tolerance Policy:

""This is definitely new," says Diane Eikenberry, an associate director at the National Immigrant Justice Center. "It's something we haven't seen."

From the Economist:

"There are two controlling decisions for how to treat children who are detained by immigration authorities—neither of which requires family separation".

"John Kelly, the president's chief of staff, first suggested separating children from families to deter illegal immigration back in March 2017. Mr. Sessions proudly announced his zero-tolerance policy in April. Kirstjen Nielsen, the homeland-security secretary, a job which involves overseeing border enforcement, later insisted that there was no such policy".

The Economist also fact checks the claim that the Zero-Tolerance policy is not used as a deterrent by quoting Jeff Sessions, "If you don't want your child to be separated, then don't bring them across the border illegally", as evidence that separation is used deliberately as a deterrent.

Far-left fact checking also directly addressed claims made by the administration, specifically including the role of zero-tolerance in family separation and its debated use

as a deterrent. The Intercept states that officials have admitted the zero-tolerance policy

was meant as a deterrent and quotes an ORR official who apparently stated, "his agency

hopes the program will deter parents from entering the country without authorization".

The Intercept also fact checks the Trump administration's claims that media is

misrepresenting the facts when covering family separation with expert testimony from

Abbott with Bethany Christian Services:

"They claimed that the federal government is not separating babies from their parents and
denying that government agents have used false pretenses to take kids from their parents,
never to be returned again. Abbott said both claims were false".

Far-right fact checking looked like blaming the liberal and broadly the elite

agenda combing the two as one force for action for creating a frenzy around Trump

enforcing an existing immigration law and consistently reminded the audience that

Obama detained children as well, and that the liberal media is intentionally creating a

narrative that positions Trump as a villain.

From Fox:

 "So here we've got the outrages overcoming the facts. I'll give you an example. There's
three reasons why parents or adults are separated from children. One, they're posing as
the parent and they're not the parent, They're a threat to the child, Or they're put into
criminal proceedings".

A Fox segment includes guest speaker Enrique Asevedo of Univision News

talking about how there is no law that requires child separation, and as such it is purely

the Trump administration's prerogative to maintain this system. While he is speaking, his

face and the others in the panel are stacked on the left side of the screen in small squares

while the majority of the screen is taken up by video clips changing around every one

second depicting what viewers are left to assume are children in these detention centers.

These clips labeled "Health and Human Services" with no date or location included, show children wearing hoodies, shorts, and sneakers. The first clip shows the back of two children sitting at a table with two other children sitting at a table in front of them, all with paper in front of them on the desk and the children positioned as if they are writing. The small strip of wall shown has bright colored border suggesting these children are in a classroom with familiar objects. Then the clip shifts to a close up of a pool table with balls scattered as if a game is currently being played. One second later the clip shifts to a view of five boys sitting close together on a couch. The camera captures their backs and the large tv screen they are facing. On the tv is a soccer field in a video game. The boys are in relaxed poses. The one in the center has his elbow on the top of couch and his hood pulled up. The boy on the far left has shoulders hunched, leaned into the TV. The next clip shows the back of one boy's head seems to be facing a large tv mounted on the wall. The tv screen shows women speaking behind a desk similar to daytime news shows. The next clip focuses on one boys' hands holding a video game controller and moving buttons as if currently playing. The knees of the boy to his right and the back and right shoulder of the boy to his left are in the shot, showing the three are sitting close together. While Enrique is speaking about the atrocity of family separation and the clips are scrolling, the headline at the bottom of the screen reads "Separating Fact from Fiction at the Border". Then, as the video game clip still on, the host cuts in:

 "What do you make of Jeff Sessions' explanation you know when he says when a parent commits a crime the child cannot go to jail with them in order to keep the family together and they are saying crossing the border illegally is breaking the law, so when that happens unfortunately, temporarily, while the parents go through the process here because they're not gonna be caught and released anymore, that they have to be separated so they're trying to find safe places to hold these children- we saw images of some of those areas. Obviously, it's a terrible situation for families to be separated, but it, you know, when you look at it that way does it, does that make any sense to you at all?"

The host identified the children playing pool and video games as being those who are in

temporary shelters while parents "go through the process". The images of the children

playing pool, playing video games, spending time with peers, and going to class, without

being explicitly addressed, suggests to viewers that regardless of whether Trump, Obama,

or an older law from the 1980s is to blame, these children are in a safe, fun place. These

kids are not in "cages".

Another Fox example involves a Tucker Carlson segment. This particular

segment starts with the headline at bottom of screen: "Fury Over Law Enforcement at the

Border". They decide to not use child separation or family separation or cages or

detention. They decide to use "law enforcement" suggesting nothing is going on beyond

what must go on in response to criminal behavior and maintaining law and order. This

language frames the liberal media coverage of family separation in almost a sarcastic

tone, calling out their outrage is something ridiculous. Carlson starts his segment by

reiterating the theme that the crisis is being conjured by liberals and is not real:

"The spectacle of illegal immigrants being separated from their children at the border has
ceased to be a news story in any traditional sense of the term. It is now an event a kind of
competition in which elites vie to see who can reach greater heights of rhetorical excess
and self righteous posturing. It is performance art really. Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi
and even Hilary Clinton took an early lead in the contest by bypassing public policy
questions entirely and moving straight to theology. Hear part of their sermons, watch".

The clips in reference show both women addressing what they call hypocrisy in using

faith and Biblical passages to justify family separation. Carlson then goes beyond

blaming liberals and the liberal news and blames more broadly the elites of American

society and politics for perpetuating the drama.

"So the same people who support third term post viability abortion for purposes of sex
selection are now lecturing you about God and sin and the holiness of children. Feel

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chastened? But wait there's more. So much more. On Facebook senator Ben Sass called the administration's policy wicked, as immoral and devilish. Former first lady Laura Bush likened it to the interment of the Japanese during world war II a moral stain upon this nation. Former CIA director Michael Haden went all the way he tweeted out a picture of Auschwitz death camp and compared the US government to the Nazis. After sobering up Haden walked that back a little on television but not much. Watch".
The clip said: "I know we're not Nazi Germany….but we need be careful not to move in that direction".

Breitbart also promises its audience that their coverage will give you the facts.

They also argue that liberal news media is creating the spectacle and in reality, Trump is

left with no other option under the law. One article states that entering the country is

illegal and therefore these migrants are lawbreakers and that the "zero tolerance policy"

is merely treating all lawbreakers as lawbreakers. Thus, similarly to Fox coverage,

Breitbart coverage declares the spectacle as created by "media" in general and elites, and

positions the "media" as an agent for the rich and powerful. From Breitbart:

"The fire hose of fake news from the establishment media this week on the issue of illegal immigrant families separated at the border is designed to mislead the American people — and to distract from Trump's recent successes".

"When the media claim Trump has a "choice," what they mean is he has a choice to ignore the law as Obama did when he illegally released untold numbers of illegals into America".

 "The media will not tell you this because the media do not want you to know that flooding America with non-citizens is their true agenda. The rich and powerful love to exploit and abuse these individuals, as they can leverage their immigration status for illegally low wages, and politicians are salivating at the chance to bestow voting rights on them — and thus entrench their power."

Not only is the spectacle "fake news" but it is carefully crafted to distract Americans

from what is really happening, that liberal elites are plotting against the American people

to grow in their power.

Much like fact checking during Family Separation, fact checking coverage among

center, left, and far-left leaning media during the Caravan spectacle most often combatted

claims made by Trump, particularly three claims made during the height of the Caravan

spectacle:

"Sadly it looks like Mexico's Police and Military are unable to stop the Caravan heading
to the Southern Border of the United States. Criminals and unknown Middle Easterners
are mixed in. I have alerted Border Patrol and Military that this is a National Emergy.
Must change laws"!

"You know what you should do John go to the middle of the caravan, take your cameras
and search. Ok. You're gonna find MS-13, you're gonna find middle easterns, you're
gonna find everything. And guess what, we're not allowing them in our country. We
want safety".

Shortly after, the President also suggested that George Soros, as part of the democratic

agenda, is responsible for funding the caravan in order to speed their arrival up to election

day to bolster the democratic vote.

The Economist calls out Trump's claims stating, "much of what he says is untrue

or at least unsubstantiated". Particularly concerned with the recent claims mentioned

above, the article specifically aims to debunk them by citing another article written by a

journalist on the ground, which states there is no evidence that the democrats funded the

caravan, of middle easterners present, or criminals, and that Hondurans' reasons for

coming "make sense" as does their method of coming in a big group. The Intercept fact

checks these claims as well while also attaching the nature of their alleged falsehood to a

broader issue stating:

"Trump administration officials up to the president himself have fanned the flames of
racist paranoia, with the commander-in-chief baselessly claiming that the caravan was
infiltrated by "unknown Middle Easterners"."

The Washington Post also fact checks Trump's claim regarding the caravan's funding

and in employs a tone that attempts to de-legitimize the president:

"Trump, again without evidence (or, in this case, logic), says Democrats arranged the
caravan (from their little-known party headquarters in Honduras, presumably)…".

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Tactics to debunk Trump's claims also involved discussing the history of migrant caravans and the role of non-profits in their formation as to reduce the amount of robbery and rape involved in the journey. TIME points out that non-profits have been aiding migrant groups cross through Central America for over 15 years "to make their journey safer and plight more visible". This "fact" elicits the reader's assumption or common sense understanding that a migrant's journey north is typically not safe and that it should be safe. The article includes an interview with a professor who explains that this year's caravan is bigger than in past years due to social media spreading the word and due to increasingly deteriorating conditions in Honduras.

Additionally, coverage employing the fact checking approach regarding these specific claims extended their argument to broader claims made by the administration. For instance, The Economist ends an article by reminding readers that the U.S. is not under attack at the southern border by a hoard of illegal immigrants, and that on the contrary, the "numbers have dropped", and then ends with this statement: "But Mr. Trump rejects the idea that made America great in the first place—that anyone can become American". MSNBC also took the president's unevidenced claims as license to broaden the discussion to other false claims he's made but took it a step further in an apparent attempt to discredit his words and projected persona in general. For example, one segment includes the host asking a guest journalist, "How do you cover the lies in the volume that he churns them out"? This same host then claims that the President is wrong in blaming the democrats for weak immigration law when the Republicans control "every center of power in Washington". The Host states Trump cannot deliver his campaign promise to build the wall or to secure the border because he cannot rally his fellow

republicans to agree. Then, the host turns to the segment table panel and addresses New York Times journalist Nick Confessore stating: "Your paper did a great job of exposing him as a fraud in terms of being self-made and as a fraud politician", immediately setting the intent of the segment as not centered on clarifying claims made about the caravan, but rather claims the president makes about seemingly any topic in order to establish the president as an unreliable, non-credible source of information. Following the host's lead guest Nick Confessore responds,

"It's an old strategy create a threat externally when he can't find one internally, when the GOP is as powerful as its been in our country, and you can fight it with facts right, there's already a wall on our border, there's a fence and that's the point. We have our border, it's pretty well policed, our border policy is not a disaster, and the people in that caravan are 3,000 miles away, and if George Soros wants to get them here by election day he's gonna need like 4 747s to do it".

The tone is light as if making fun of the president's claims and diminishing any legitimacy to the argument that additional border security is necessary.

Similarly, The National Review tackles Trump's claims but maintains its conservative lean by making clear to readers that although these recent specific claims are false, ultimately what matters is border security. The article leads with: "Whatever Trump's exaggerations, the caravan itself isn't a fabrication" and goes on to make its central point: "…it's not being paid for by George Soros, or infiltrated by unknown Middle Easterners. But the president gets the big point right: We have borders and should enforce them".

It's all politicized:

Consistent with typical media spectacle coverage involving the Latino Immigrant Issue, both Family Separation and the Migrant Caravan coverage across the political

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spectrum framed the issue in political terms. Within both spectacles this involved claims that one political party is not exercising full range of power to alleviate the situation, politicians (Trump, current law makers, and prospective law makers alike) using the issue as a political talking point to garner support and maintain their name in the headlines. While some coverage, mostly centrist, pointed out this politicization and decried it, most coverage seemed to consciously or unconsciously understand both border events through a political lens, and thus framed their article or news segment as a pitch for or against a particular political agenda in contrast to reporting solely on human experience, motivation, etc. While all themes in this analysis demonstrate the line between two sides of the political spectrum in mass media, and thus also demonstrate the active group identity work taking place in mass media as we understand it through the theoretical contributions of Habermas and Mead, this theme perhaps does so most explicitly by signaling in direct terms which political group is for *you* the viewer and stands for *your* values, as well as which group is attacking or in the least undermining *you* and *your* values.

During the Family Separation spectacle, center and left of center media coverage criticized the Trump administration's political approach. For example, from The Economist: "I say it's very strongly the Democrats' fault", said Mr. Trump, a statement even more bizarre and fact-lite than normal". Additionally, from TIME: "Trump tends to take his policy cues from his most ardent supporters who crowd into his events — and not from the seasoned political advisers who are urging the President to end this chaos."

While certainly distinct in tone and allegations, both right and far-right coverage criticized the democrats' political approach. For example, The National Review claimed

democrats are using the Family Separation spectacle strategically and called the spectacle

a "Hurricane Katrina moment" for votes. The National Review also criticizes democrat

politicians for piggy backing on the emotional hype without coming to the table with

solutions:

"Merely accusing [Trump] of spreading or unleashing hate against immigrants is not a
substitute for a policy that treats border security as anything but a right-wing talking
point."
"Trump's rhetoric on the issue may be excessive and inappropriate. But so long as his
opponents have nothing to offer but amnesty in one form or another, his stand appears
reasonable to many if not most Americans who believe that the sanctuary movement is an
attack on the rule of law and that this country has as much right to police its borders as
any other on the planet. In such an atmosphere, any notion of there being an
overwhelming Democratic advantage on immigration is as bogus as the photo-shopped
cover of *Time*."
"Anger about family separation is universal, but as the anti-Trump furor becomes an
appeal for what amounts to open borders, any political advantage for Democrats from the
controversy looks like a mirage"

Far-right coverage went further, claiming the liberal media and elites are not just using

the spectacle for political gain, but are manufacturing it entirely.

From Breitbart:

"The rich and powerful love to exploit and abuse these individuals, as they can leverage
their immigration status for illegally low wages, and politicians are salivating at the
chance to bestow voting rights on them — and thus entrench their power."
"Under Obama, when illegal border crossers were put into the criminal justice system,
families were indeed separated. Obama, of course, rarely prosecuted, even though the law
calls for it. Neither Democrats nor the media cared about family separation then, which
proves this manufactured and coordinated uproar is only about politics".

From Fox:

"This is not reporting. It's called trying to create a narrative regardless of the actual facts
to manipulate readers' emotions and ultimately force a change in policy".

Far-right, right and centrist media covered the Migrant Caravan spectacle through

the context of the midterm elections and cited the elections as the reason why the

Democrats were not taking action. The National Review and the Economist argued that

Democrats are afraid to take the lead. The National Review stated the fear stemmed from appearing racist to voters and the Economist states the fear stemmed more generally from being unsure of where to stand on the issue in order to please voters and is causing Democrats to simply avoid the issue. The National Review argues that Democrats need to stop pretending this isn't an issue and the Economist argues that Democrats need to offer plan on "controlling America's borders" - as if no argument is needed that it is out of control and that Trump is right in that "the group cannot be let in just because they are in a group". Both suggest democratic politicians are being disingenuous and allowing the status quo to continue without addressing alleged issues.

Left leaning and far-left media also framed the caravan in terms of the midterm elections. Both point to Trump as the culprit for politicizing the migrants and claim his strategy of vilifying migrants from Mexico and Central America, as well as inciting fear against them, is a well-established pattern for political gain.

From Washington Post:

"The genius in Trump's pre-election emergency: The asylum seekers, if they reach the border at all, won't arrive until after the election. Therefore, he can frighten everybody about the menace they pose, and voters will be none the wiser".

From TIME:

"President Donald Trump — who has long critiqued U.S. immigration policies and denigrated immigrants since the start of his presidential campaign — has made numerous baseless claims about the caravan in recent weeks, spreading alarm and touting it as a "Great Midterm issue for Republicans!"

From The Intercept:

"With less than two weeks to go until the midterm elections, the Trump administration has aggressively returned to the narrative that the president rode in on: the notion that the border is a place of extraordinary violence and chaos, and the implication that the people who cross it heading north are dangerous subhumans".

"As Election Day approaches, all signs indicate that Trump is set on manufacturing a new border crisis, seizing on a caravan of migrants making their way through Mexico as the latest symbol of the imagined threat that he owes much of his political success to".

""Let's be clear. This is an intentionally created 'crisis' timed and planned to have maximum impact on the midterm elections," Steve Kozachik, a Tucson City Council member, wrote in an October 12 op-ed for the Arizona Daily Star. "It's all about politics and optics. It's all about using young moms and their children as political pawns in our election cycle. And it's disgusting".

Some left leaning media coverage virtually framed the migrant caravan wholly within the federal congressional election. MSNBC coverage often shows Trump speaking at a rally before transitioning to deconstructing his claims. One clip in particular shows Trump at a rally discussing how the democrats love the migrant caravan, that the democrats want to "open our borders" and let people in "illegally" and give these immigrants "cars" and "drivers licenses". Here Trump also brings up sanctuary cities and how this crowd surely does not like sanctuary cities. The crowd boos. The MSNBC segment's host points out that Trump is on a national tour to speak to rallies ahead of the election and suggests that he is using the caravan to pit his base against democrats, and in doing so is stoking fear and anger against what feels like an invasion orchestrated or at least cheered on by democrats. Following the host's statement, members of the panel assert that Trump is going to use images of the caravan while he rallies ahead of the election to spur his base. Here the segment transitions to discussing the best approach for democrats for the election in light of this latest Latino Immigrant issue, and how they should be coming up with a plan and a message of hope. Importantly, their discussion turns to what "voters really care about" which panelists claimed are issues like health care, not immigration policy; almost as if suggesting voters do not really care about the fate of these migrants, but Trump is getting base riled up about it in order to strategically

use this to elicit fear and frame democrats as enabling and encouraging dangerous people

to enter the country. Another MSNBC segment starts off framing the issue politically by

asking panelists (and essentially viewers) how democrats should be responding to Trump

calling this a national emergency and blaming democrats for it. One panelist responds:

"Donald Trump is the master distractor. Here we are 15 days from the election we've got
some of the sharpest democrats and they are running scared and what they do when
they're running scared is resort to fear tactics".

This panelist continues to describe the "real issues" democrats should be focusing on in

order to win back congress: the economy, health care, money in politics, and "making

Washington function again". Another panelist states: "The problem is this caravan is the

worst possible time for democrats because they're gonna show up at the gates right when

people are voting and people will have it on their minds when they're voting".

     Far-right media coverage blamed the political system in general as creating

immigration loopholes through which migrants can take advantage of U.S. law and

immigration system. For example, one Breitbart article starts by quoting Joe Kennedy

from a recent TIME article where Joe Kennedy condemns the policy approach and

rhetoric towards the caravan, then moves to critique him stating:

"Rep. Joe Kennedy is being groomed by Democrats for a future White House run, and he
tries to blame President Donald Trump for the migration, even though the poor Honduran
migrants are exploiting border loopholes created by Presidents George W. Bush and
Barack Obama".

The article goes on to claim that Joe Kennedy is actually just trying to market a re-release

of JFKs book about immigration. The article transitions to discuss the book and

immigration in general, telling readers that the book washes over true American history

involving colonists and "self-reliant children" and reduces *our* history to merely a "nation

of immigrants". This is to say that the rhetoric calling for a return to American principles

or our duty to accept the tired huddled masses, is a misrepresentation of the facts and is a

narrative contrived by the democrats to bring in more immigrants, which is intended as

fear inducing for the Breitbart audience, as the article also states:

"Joe Kennedy uses his *Time* article to urge his progressive and business allies to import
more ill-educated Honduran laborers and consumers, whatever the impact on Americans'
ability to win good jobs, buy homes, afford children, and heal their widening political
divisions."

Fox frames the caravan in the midterm election as well, but in contrast with Breitbart,

Fox says this is advantageous for Republicans, not Democrats:

"Democrats are afraid to talk about immigration. Sanctuary cities packs a punch, liberal
think tanks are saying not to mention it, and democrats call to abolish ice. What this does
is put immigration in the center of focus of the national debate, which is exactly what
Trump and republicans want because when you see visuals of migrants tearing down the
border at Mexico it justifies the president's call for more border security. Couldn't be a
better political gift to be honest".

The Blame Game

As issues at the border are politicized, the blame game is often played to position

one party, politician, or candidate as being at fault for causing the issue or not addressing

the issue sooner, while *x* equal and opposite political entity is either working hard to

solve the issue or cannot due to having their hands tied by the political entity at fault.

Coverage of Family Separation fell on two sides: blaming the Trump administration and

blaming democrats for creating and/or maintaining weak immigration laws. Right, center,

left, and far left media aligned in asserting that Trump and his "Zero-Tolerance" policy

were to blame for the humanitarian crisis of family separation. The media grappled with

whether detention was an old or new issue, and what kind of detention was actually

taking place and to what degree. These sources largely agreed that "zero-tolerance" as

described when announced by Jeff Sessions was new and must be rolled back in order to

restore humane detention practices, meaning Trump and his administration are at fault.

From the National Review:

"Yes, I want the president to end his administration's family-separation policy. He doesn't need Congress to do the right thing. America can secure its border without taking a child from his mother's arms to prosecute a misdemeanor".
From the Economist:

"Since May, soon after Jeff Sessions, the attorney-general, announced a new "zero-tolerance policy" for illegal immigrants, more than 2,300 children have been separated from adults and placed in government-run shelters".

"Mr Sessions's zero-tolerance policy, which instigated the fiasco, aimed to prosecute all illegal immigrants on arrival and refer them to the criminal-justice system".

From TIME:

"The new "zero tolerance" policy also marks a profound break from past Administrations, when parents traveling with children were usually either released wearing tracking devices, detained with their children or admitted to case-management programs in an effort to keep families intact".

"In June, a federal judge appointed by George W. Bush refused the Trump Administration's request to dismiss an ACLU lawsuit challenging the policy".

From MSNBC:

"Now nearly 2,000 migrant children ripped from their parents under these new orders from the Trump administration".

"Donald Trump caused this crisis".

"New policy of the Trump administration where the federal government is now forcibly taking babies and kids away from their parents and locking them up if the family is caught crossing the border without papers".

Use of the words "forcibly taking babies and kids" in place of family separation or child

separation is notable. MSNBC's use of emotional language is intended to incite outrage

in the viewer and almost sounds like the Trump administration is kidnapping children or

at least conjures the image of men in uniforms ripping young children out of their

parents' arms and driving them away. The segment continues:

"So here's what we think is happening. Kids and babies who have never before been ripped away from their moms and dads at the border. This is a new policy put in place by the Trump administration"

At this point, images scroll of children crowded in concrete cinderblock rooms with bars, sitting together on concrete benches attached to the walls, with shoulders hunched forward, heads in hands, and telling viewers that these images depict the holding facilities at the border at which people are temporarily detained before being transferred, in the case of children, transferred to an approved shelter.

Far-right coverage blames liberal media and politicians for fabricating the family separation media spectacle, and blames lax immigration laws and "loop holes" in the system, and the democrats' incentivizing approach to immigration policy for what is taking place at the border, and defend Trump as simply doing his job as president by upholding the law and maintaining the "rule of law".

From Breitbart:

"Once word got out that illegals with small children would be let loose into America, the number of children crossing the border exploded".

"First off, the policy of separating illegal border crossers from minor children has been going on forever. The media are just mad because Trump is enforcing the law, is refusing to "catch and release" illegals into our country, where most disappear never to be seen or heard from again"

"Once again, we have the media and Democrats demanding special treatment for illegal immigrants that legal immigrants do not enjoy. Once again we are incentivizing lawbreaking and treating the line-jumpers better than those who follow the rules."

From Fox:

"…Trump is right. The law has to change, congress must act. Not only to end this unaccompanied minor loophole, but the catch and release program, as well as chain migration, asylum fraud, all of it".

Much of the same phrases involving liberal media, weak immigration law, and

democrats incentivizing increased immigration echoed in far-right coverage during the Migrant Caravan spectacle. Specifically, far-right coverage that sought to undermine claims that the members of the caravan were coming to the U.S. to seek asylum compounded this effort by working to establish that the migrants are not operating under a legitimate system – flee your dangerous or life threatening circumstance and ask another country for asylum – and therefore someone is to blame for the number of Central Americans coming to the border. As the blame is then not directed at lack of government control over violent and militarized gang organizations or any other "push factor", the blame is targeted on "pull factors" within the United States. The difference within the caravan spectacle is that right leaning coverage more often aligned with far-right coverage than during family separation.

From the National Review:

"Our laws and rules have conspired to render the southern border almost null and void for the category of migration that has been growing at the most rapid clip, families and minors from Central America".

Additionally, National Review coverage stated immigration authorities are forced into a catch and release policy due to lack of funding, overcrowding, and lack of law enforcement tools. The article goes further to say migrants can "simply utter the magic word "asylum" and get in" because Calls for US to withdraw from UN treaty because of "particular social group" criteria allowing bogus asylum claims. Additionally, the article states,

"People who pass through other countries with asylum systems (such as Mexico) should not be permitted even to apply for asylum because they are, *by definition*, no longer fleeing persecution".

The article is essentially stating the caravan is demanding rights it should not have and

arguably does not have. Importantly the article ends:

"As it stands now, we have created a "right" to asylum in the United States, a surrender of sovereignty whose consequences are becoming increasingly clear. Only the American people, through their elected representatives, should decide who gets to move here, not individual foreigners asserting a "right" created by the U.N. and vindicated by post-national anti-borders activists".

More from National Review:

"What migrants in the caravan understand is that, as members of a family unit from Central America, if they set foot in the United States, they have a good chance of staying (hundreds of migrants from a 1,500-strong caravan earlier this year reportedly made it into the United States). They can surrender to border agents and probably get a bus ticket to the interior, pending proceedings for which they may never show up."

"The problem is an overly permissive asylum system" and "preferred way to penetrate our borders".

This fear of losing sovereignty and use of the term "penetrate" echoes the far-right invocation of "invasion" and stokes resentment in readers to feel that people are taking advantage of the system. Thus the audience is guided to feel that the migrants firstly do not deserve sympathy and instead deserve exclusion, and secondly, U.S. immigration law should be more restrictive.

Once again, the Fox segment including former ICE director Thomas as a guest includes such statements. Thomas blamed the democratic party and specific democratic politicians for not coming up with a solution and encouraging migrants to come to the United States. Thomas argued that "democrats weren't at the table" when discussing immigration reform, and that the call to "abolish ice" is not the solution. Thomas states the democrats are "enticing" immigrants to come to the U.S. and lists the consequences:

"when you entice people to come to this country they will die coming to this country. Women will be raped, children will die crossing the river, and bankrolling criminal organizations having open borders".

Again, Thomas mentions abolishing ICE and states this approach is "open borders". He

ends his statement that "everyone in Washington should protect this country and they're not doing it". This is an excellent example of the false dichotomy: either we have open borders or increased military at the border. Allowing asylum seekers in the U.S. immigration court system and U.S. detention centers is to support human trafficking, rape, and organized crime. Linking support of the caravan with support for human trafficking is echoed in Breitbart, for example:

"Ramos has become a notorious open borders advocate with his support for human smuggling along the U.S.-Mexico border".

Another argument against the democrats is that the compassion routine is not cutting it. Fox panelists argue over the best approach and boil the democrat vs republican approach down to compassion vs. militarization, as if to acknowledge to on the fence viewers that yes, the images of mothers with young children can make us sad, we are human, but we are not a charity, we are a nation and we must protect ourselves by securing out border.

Who should respond and how?

Media coverage also attempted to answer the question of responsibility for responding to an international crisis. Even when acknowledging a problem, whether it be violence or lack of opportunity, coverage would then pose the question who or which nation is responsible for responding to the needs of Central Americans. This question stems from two essential frameworks. The first is that there are limited resources in the US and therefore we have to be careful who we allow access to these resources. The second is a dismissal of the circumstances under which families decide to leave- often spur of the moment following a death threat or the killing of a close family member- leaving no time or space to file a petition in the US embassy and wait "the right way".

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Within this debate, asylum in itself as a right is championed, questioned, or critiqued.

Left, centrist, and some right leaning media argued that the U.S. is responsible to receive any migrant seeking asylum, and therefore is responsible to receive the caravan. This is often described in terms of an identity crisis "if not us, then who?". The Economist for example includes statements targeting Trump's actions to reduce immigration as not being ideal, citing how he has made it difficult for families to reunite, reduced the number of refuges admitted and compared this number with how many Lebanon is accepting; suggesting the U.S. is not taking their fair share and should accept more asylum seekers. Some left leaning media, though, goes further to offer broad solutions and to make broad claims about U.S. demographics and what the country needs:

"We should be working with Honduras and other troubled central American countries to strengthen their economies to expand trade to expand opportunities there and to have a regularized flow of immigration because, by the way we have an empty country, we have a negative population declining demographics and we could use some more immigrants".

Some center and right leaning coverage positioned Mexico as also responsible for responding to the crisis as the caravan can and should seek asylum first in Mexico when they arrive there. For example, one Economist article describes United States' pressure on Mexico to stop the incoming migrants through its "porous southern border" and that Mexico "tried to comply" and deports thousands each year. Then this described effort is contrasted with the current Mexican presidents' approach to the problem, who the article states essentially ignores the migrant issue due to not wanting to risk violence and claims the border police "encourage" people to seek asylum in the United States rather than stopping anyone from on passing through. The National Review states that closing ports of entry between the U.S. and Mexico is a good solution because, despite linked

economies, Mexico would suffer more. Which is to say, if Mexico is not doing their part, they (not the U.S.) should be punished.

When debate shifted from who is blame to who is responsible, it often included proposed solutions or critique of current approaches. The Economist included a critique of the current administration stating, "Mr. Trump prefers to deter immigration by force", and argued that the president's threat to cut aid funding to these Central American countries might spur further migrants to make the journey. The National Review echoed this critique of cutting foreign aid:

"The president's threat to cut off foreign aid to the source and transit countries south of the border is less fanciful but still counterproductive. The whole point of that money is to reduce emigration pressures, so eliminating it would seem to be a case of cutting off your nose to spite your face".

The National Review also offers new proposals which fall in line more with the far-right approach of increasing militarization:

"Other measures could include deputizing state and local law enforcement to make immigration arrests (which the law permits in the case of "an actual or imminent mass influx of aliens arriving off the coast of the United States, or near a land border"), setting up emergency tent-city detention centers on the border, and/or using the travel-ban authority to prohibit the admission of anyone participating in a caravan."

Within the Family Separation spectacle, this theme "who should respond and how" primarily centered on two opposing national sentiments. The first involved familiar phrases such as "nation of immigrants" and criticized the policy as "un-American". This national sentiment, that we Americans are not fulfilling our duty to care for the vulnerable immigrants which the statue of liberty welcomes, is present in center and left leaning media.

From The Economist:

"Many incredible things have happened since Mr Trump became president. Witnessing

the UN's human-rights chief actually get something right when he chastised America's "unconscionable" decision to inflict "abuse on children" is certainly one of them". From MSNBC:

"As Americans we should not tolerate this".

The second and opposing national sentiment is that we Americans are not fulfilling our

duties to our own fellow Americans and should instead focus public outcry and financial

resources toward our *own* kids. This sentiment is present in far-right media coverage of

both media spectacles.

The far-right media message, "what about *our* families, *our* culture, and *our*

resources" is perhaps the most explicit us vs. them rhetoric employed during these border

spectacles. Far-right media consistently pitted the needs of immigrant families against the

needs of American citizens and argued politicians are responsible of taking care of "our

own". Consistent examples within the family separation spectacle included the need to

take care of or respond to the plight of families who are "permanently separated",

children in foster care, and tax paying working-class families. The last of these also was a

group often cited in the migrant caravan spectacle as suffering as a result of increased

immigration. Far-right coverage of both spectacles involved asserting that the left and the

elite position in response to these immigration issues were contrived as part of an agenda

for more money in some way or for more political power at the expense of American

citizens. This assertion warned viewers and readers that liberal politicians and wealthy

elites who are against the Trump administration's approach are in reality, against *you*.

Democrats and elites are for *them*, but Trump is for *you*.

During the spectacle of family separation, Tucker Carlson shows a clip of Pelosi

and Clinton denouncing family separation. He discusses how many "elites" across the

political spectrum have spoken out against it. Then Carlson goes on to debate Americans

vs Immigrants in what is one of the most pointed examples of this *what about us* theme:

"The rich and powerful reminding you just how virtuous they are. You think any of these people really care about family separation? If they did, they'd be worried about the collapse of the American family which is measurable and real, but they're not worried about that, in fact they welcome that collapse because strong families are an impediment to their political power. That's why they're always lecturing you about the patriarchy and the evil of the nuclear family. Millions and millions of American kids are growing up with one parent at home. Families separated thanks to their policies. And that's fine with them. Many of those kids by the way have a parent behind bars. It's not just illegal immigrants who are separated from their children. The majority of American citizens in prison have minor kids they've left behind. These families have been separated by force by our justice system because they committed a crime. So in that way these kids are exactly like the kids you've been watching on television today. The difference of course is they're Americans, so nobody is spending 35 grand yearly a piece to make sure they're ok. Democratic politicians and cable news anchors don't visit their foster homes to highlight their plight, they're ignored. This is one of those moments that tells you everything about our ruling class".
(Image showcased next to his face reads "immigration crisis")
"They care far more about foreigners than about their own people. You probably suspected that already. The other thing you may have noticed is that they're not especially interested in solutions to anything. They're great at yelling and aprining, not so good at fixing and building. We could strengthen our borders to keep illegals out, we could fund more immigration courts to process those who sneak through anyway, we could even build more housing facilities at the border, holding facilities to allow families to stay together while their asylum claims are processed. But the left is not interested in any of that. Their only solution is immediate amnesty for anyone who crosses our borders with a minor in tow. And of course, that's the same as no borders at all. Not to mention a powerful incentive for child smuggling. They don't care. Because no matter what they tell you this is not about helping children. A lot of people yelling at you on tv don't even have children so don't for a second let them take the moral high ground. Their goal is to change your country forever and they're succeeding by the way. Since 2014 to name one example among many…
 (image pops up of a young man on top of wall, straddling barbed wire)
…at least half a million central Americans who came here illegally have been released back inside our borders. Did anyone vote for that? And more to the point, who's going to pay for that? Not the people you've been watching on television today their kids go to private school if they have them. Their neighborhoods look exactly like they did in 1960, no demographic change at all just like they like it. There's no cost to them. The cost is entirely on you. But don't complain or else they will call you Hitler".

Breitbart also explicitly draws this line in between us and them by comparing

family separation at the border with families who are "permanently separated":

"Those who do not have a choice in family separation are the legions of American families permanently separated from family members when that family member is killed at the hands of an illegal alien."

This article goes a step further then Carlson. He not only explicitly says why are we supposed to care about them when our own our suffering- relying on the false dichotomy that we have only a small amount of financial and emotional resources to go around and thus to give to one is to take away from another – but goes further to depict the immigrant as mortal enemy. There are "legions" of *our own* families separated due to the predator that is the illegal immigrant.

More from Breitbart:

"And then there is the unholy cost of the crime, the families permanently separated by illegals who murder their children. The Angel Moms. Remember the Angel Moms. Remember the parents who lost their children forever because illegals were released into America".

On the cost to *our* families by allowing migrants out of detention, Breitbart also echoes the decades old theme of good immigrant vs bad immigrant, that these "bad" immigrants lower working Americans' wages and take American jobs, and that their children are entering our schools without contributing to its funding, and therefore American tax payers must bear the cost. During the migrant caravan spectacle, Breitbart for example states: "This "More Migrants!" demand of the dead President and the live Democrat treat the preferences of "*actual Americans"* as entirely subordinate to the ambitious State's desire for more "human resources."" adding that "the result" is that "one in five people in America are either immigrants or children of immigrants".

V. DISCUSSION

Narratives have a significant impact on individual and group identity formation (Anderson 2016, Chavez 2008, Loseke 2007, Maines 2000). Analyzing the narratives promulgated in the national conversation on immigration reveals the multifaceted internal debate about who "we" are as Americans, who is designated a worthy immigrant deserving a legal pathway to integration, and who is designated an unworthy immigrant deserving detention and deportation. Due to the powerful role that media spectacles in particular play in informing the nation's identity (Chavez 2008) and subsequently, one's political identity within one of two opposing forces, as understood through Mead's idea of the 'self' and Habermas' discussion of the mass media, this content analysis presents common themes utilized in the national debate about who the immigrants involved in the spectacle are, why they are at the border, and how *we* as Americans should feel about it. The themes most prominent in the wrestling narratives are: 1) lamenting trauma and condemning those who caused it, 2) fact checking the enemy and delivering reality to the audience, 3) framing in political terms, 4) assigning a guilty party for the Latino Immigrant Issue at hand, and 5) asking who is responsible to then step up and address the Latino Immigrant Issue and at what cost to *Americans*?

Trauma primarily referred to childhood trauma in Family Separation coverage. Right, center, left, and far-left leaning media specially discussed the adverse psychological effects children who are separated from parents suffer, and blamed in no uncertain terms this childhood trauma on the Trump administration. Discussion of childhood trauma in far-right coverage on the other hand, spilled into discussion of the children's parents- who are responsible for their care, responsible for the decision to

travel north, and the decision to enter the United States at a port of entry or outside of a port of entry. This discussion prompted the more explicit distinction between whether the parents were deserving of sympathy and access to certain rights or whether they were criminals, traffickers, unknown outsiders, or irresponsible parents taking advantage of U.S. immigration law, and therefore deserving of punishment and exclusion. Some media, most typically leaning far-left and far-right, went further than blame for trauma- which could insinuate no more than who is at fault for the circumstances and who can then correct them- to actually assign an abuser. Far-left media and MSNBC used the term "government inflicted" child abuse while far-right media accused the children's parents of child abuse. Trauma discussed in the Migrant Caravan spectacle ranged from description of detention facilities, the journey north, and condition of sending countries. Some right, and most center, left, and far-left coverage utilized trauma as a point to elicit sympathy for the migrants and establish their legitimacy as asylum seekers. Far-right coverage diminished the trauma experienced by migrants in efforts to de-legitimize their claims for asylum or spoke of the trauma as something self-inflicted by making the choice to leave their country and travel the dangerous journey.

Fact checking Family Separation involved footage and photos of children in detention centers, timelines and discussions of the legal policies determining child and family detention before the Zero-Tolerance policy, and in what way (or not) the Zero-Tolerance policy changed how children and families were detained. Much like fact checking during Family Separation, fact checking coverage among center, left, and far-left leaning media during the Migrant Caravan spectacle most often combatted claims made by Trump and the Trump administration, while right and far-right coverage fact

checked claims made by the liberal media about who the migrants are and what rights they have. The fact-checking theme revealed a key difference in political tribes' respective conceptualized lines between themselves, as fact checking implicitly points to who or what is circulating misinformation or manipulative coverage of an event, which is another way to point to who or what needs to be pushed out as illegitimate or unfit authority. Far-right media's intent seemed to be de-legitimizing mainstream news media and a liberal political ideology as a whole, in contrast to the left leaning and centrist media's intent to de-legitimize specific claims themselves. In the case of far-left media and some left leaning media, it can be argued the intent of their fact checking was to de-legitimize the president.

Both Family Separation and the Migrant Caravan coverage across the political spectrum framed the issue in political terms. While some coverage, mostly centrist, pointed out this politicization and decried it, most coverage seemed to unconsciously understand both border events through a political lens, and thus framed their article or news segment as a pitch for or against a particular political agenda. Within both spectacles left and far-left coverage largely noted Trump's utility of the spectacles for political gain. Far-right media informed its audience that liberal politicians are not genuine in their concern for migrants' well-being and are instead using the spectacle for their own political gain, or even to somehow increase the share of democratic voters as the migrants integrate U.S. society.

As a Latino Immigrant Issue is described, political agendas scrutinized and trauma inflictors identified, competing political ideologies must also declare who or what is to blame for creating or failing to stop the issue in broad terms. Simply put, they must

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name and blame an enemy. "Blame game" coverage of both Family Separation and the Migrant Caravan fell on two sides: blaming the Trump administration (right, center, left, and far-left media) and blaming democrats for creating and/or maintaining weak immigration laws (right and far-right media). Right leaning media notably aligned with center, left, and far-left media during Family Separation coverage and with far-right media during Migrant Caravan coverage.

The question of who should respond to the Latino Immigrant Issue and how centered on two opposing national sentiments: turning away migrants and separating families is un-American or accepting immigrants into our communities is un-American. This first national sentiment is present within center and left leaning media and is consistent with the strategy employed by center, left leaning, and far-left media to elicit sympathy from the audience through an emotional argument. The second is present in far-right media and is based on several false dichotomies: that politicians can only be in support of American citizens or of immigrant families, support of both is incompatible, that American citizens are a homogenous group from some sort of pure "American ethnicity" and cannot therefore comprised of diverse groups from across the world following centuries of waves of diverse immigrant groups, and the common dichotomy that "American resources" are scarce and are therefore threatened by incoming immigrant groups who can only be takers and not givers, and thus only deplete resources without contributing to them.

Through analysis of two recent media spectacles – Family Separation and Migrant Caravan- I argue that Chavez' "Latino Threat Narrative" now 10 years later also includes portraying Latino immigrants as swindlers and manipulators, taking advantage of the

U.S. immigration system and U.S. asylum laws. Particularly, distinct from the early 2000s immigrant threat narratives, which primarily characterized Latino immigrants as Mexican illegal aliens re-conquering, failing to integrate, and failing to do things "the right way", recent immigrant threat narratives revolve around Central Americans claiming to seek asylum but who are in fact lying, maybe gang-affiliated, and are linked with the violent illegal alien persona. Specifically, within the context of asylum seekers is necessarily the discussion around detention centers. As Americans and in process the American media develop a common sense truth about the nature of detention centers and their uses, Americans must reconcile the dueling Latino Immigrant characters presented in the media- criminal or victim- in order to rationalize and develop a common sense understanding of U.S. practice of placing families fleeing dire situations into prison like settings.

In conclusion, as the findings demonstrate the clear line drawn between the narrative espoused by far-right media (with occasional right leaning camaraderie) and everyone else, the question we are left with becomes- why? Habermas (1989) theorizes that the mass media significantly influences the public by acting as the sole source of information, and importantly argues that mass media has become corrupted as it is ever more commercialized and is a commodity increasingly less "public" but yet maintains its status as debate house and distributer of public thought. Mass media then, the primary platform for idea deliberation, information sharing, and communal truth developing, is controlled by corporate interests rather than collective free thinkers, and therefore renders the public sphere as a tool for elite and political agendas. Critical communication theory too would suggest there is an elite agenda orchestrating a "moral panic" around the

Latino Immigrant Issue (Bonn 2010, Heir 2015). This moral panic intrinsically characterizing and fueling media spectacle coverage by corporate run mass media then works to shape political identity of the consumer insofar as "the sender of the message hides his business intentions in the role of someone interested in the public welfare" (Habermas 1989: 193) and counting on a stubborn collective consciousness which forgoes "intelligent criticism of publicly discussed affairs", and is instead characterized by bowing to "a mood of conformity with publicly presented persons or personifications" (195). Thus, as the concept of self is practiced and processed through social interaction (Mead 1934), specifically though media consumption of us versus them narratives which become common sense truths unquestionably part of the self, commercialized and commodified mass media cyclically produce, reinforce, and reflect this process. Mass media corporations then depend on an audience that is rooted in political tribalism, therefore establishing mass media as an institution which simultaneously relies on and creates the social phenomenon of political identity practiced through media consumption.

The existence of two primary political identities or stances in place of one does not counter the assertion of an elite or political agenda behind the nature of mass media coverage but strengthens it. Competition among narratives serves to further drive profits as political tribalism strengthens as a pillar for American identity formation. Few Americans have direct contact with events and people at the southern border, yet we all are compelled to contribute to the national conversation and *feel* one way or another. Thus, viewing cable news coverage, following journalist icons on twitter, and skimming headlines of articles or videos shared on social media all form the public's mass media consumption patterns and follows strict brand loyalty as Americans socialize further into

their respective ideologies. Therefore, even though the relationship between the influencer and influenced is in some ways a two way street as competition for profits and political relevancy fuel this deepening ideological divide, it is ultimately mass media which possesses the authoritative ability to issue facts and experiences discussed in the public sphere a stamp of legitimacy, and in turn, legitimize the consumer's political identity.

Consequently, further research is needed to investigate the prevalence of political assimilation of news published solely to independent markets online such as Facebook channels or YouTube channels. Such an investigation would reveal important trends in political identity work through media in potentially two ways. The first might be that news coverage from independent sources follows the same patterns of politicization and thus viewers participate in political group identity work and national identity work in the same way as with corporate or traditional media coverage. The second might be that news coverage from independent sources are exceptions to the politicization process and would then reveal how these exceptions cover events wrapped up in media spectacles, who is selecting to consume these sources, if they are indeed "consumed" in the same way, and how this coverage may or may not have sufficient influence to disrupt political ideological identity formation.

Moreover, further research could address limitations with this research project. Namely, further research should expand the sample size of both the media outlets and media content analyzed. Further research should also extend this analysis to include additional contemporary Latino Immigrant Issue media spectacles.
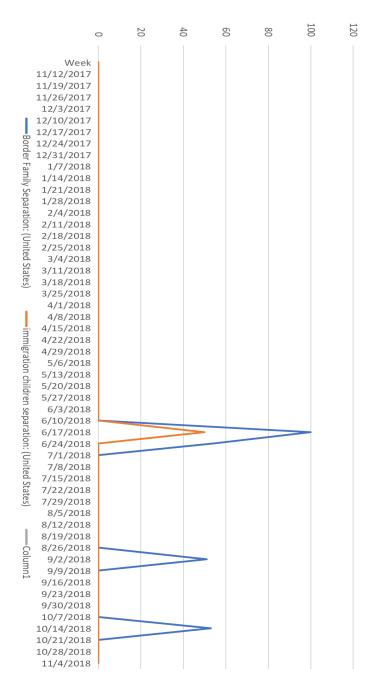
APPENDIX SECTION

Media Content Analyzed:

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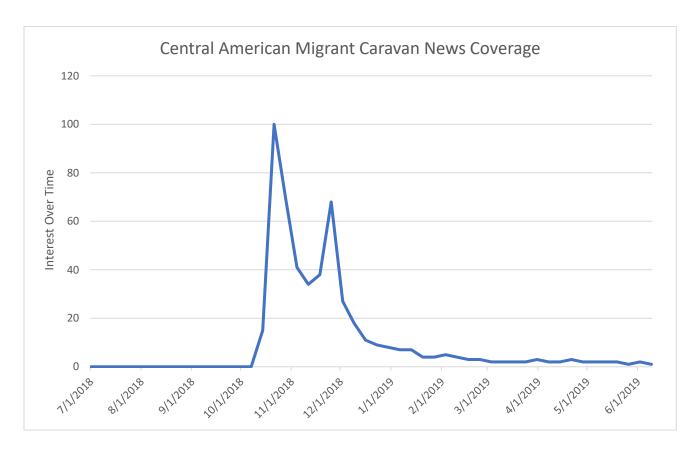
FIGURE 1
Google Trends: Interest in News Coverage of Child and Family Separation

Source: Interest over time on Google Trends for Family and Children Separation-United
States, 11/12/17 - 11/4/18 -
https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?geo=US&gprop=news&q=border%20fa
mily%20separation,immigration%20children%20separation

FIGURE 2
Google Trends: Interest in News Coverage of Central American Migrant Caravan

Central American Migrant Caravan News Coverage

Source: Interest over time on Google Trends for Migrant Caravan - United States, 7/1/18
- 6/1/19 -
https://trends.google.com/trends/explore/TIMESERIES/1571154600?hl=en-
US&tz=300&date=2018-07-01+2019-06-
01&geo=US&q=Migrant+Caravan&sni=3

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